

# DIALOGUE

BETWEEN

Dr. JOHNSON and Mrs. KNOWLES.

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ALPHABETIC

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[1851-1852]

MR. BOSWELL, for reasons best known to himself (but which are guessed at by others), refused to admit into his book, Mrs. KNOWLES's account of her Theological Dialogue with Dr. JOHNSON, although he had previously applied to her for it, and had frankly acknowledged to the truth of the particulars therein, which he afterwards thought proper to suppress. She therefore permitted her own account to be published in the Gentleman's Magazine for June 1791, p. 500.

Mr. BOSWELL then in his second edition, by a marginal note, and surely by no means in a liberal style, disavows *any* recollection of matter different from his own statement. In the third edition his note is continued, which it is hoped will be deemed a sufficient inducement and apology for offering now to the public the above-mentioned Dialogue, as a Supplement to the new edition of Mr. BOSWELL's book.

Mrs. PROZZI and Sir JOHN HAWKINS may perhaps be sometimes charged with inaccuracy; but there are several persons who figure in Mr. BOSWELL's book, who are much dissatisfied with his representations and colloquial arrangements.

“ Mr.



“ MR. URBAN,

June 22, 1791.

“ I HAVE been favoured, by Mrs. Knowles, with the perusal of the following Dialogue, or Conversation. Very striking is the mild fortitude of modest Truth; and it is finely contrasted with the boisterous violence of bigoted Sophistry, so long accustomed to victory over feigned or slight resistance, and, in a certain circle, to timid and implicit submission. I have obtained permission to publish the Dialogue; and I wish it to appear in your excellent Magazine.

A CHILD OF CANDOUR.

An interesting DIALOGUE between the late  
Dr. SAMUEL JOHNSON and Mrs. KNOWLES.

*Mrs. K.* Thy friend Jenny H—— desires her kind respects to thee, Doctor.

*Dr. J.* To me!—tell me not of her! I hate the odious wench for her apostacy: and it is you, Madam, who have seduced her from the Christian Religion.

*Mrs. K.* This is a heavy charge, indeed. I must beg leave to be heard in my own defence: and I entreat the attention of the present learned and candid company, desiring they will judge how far I am able to clear myself of so cruel an accusation.

*Dr. J.* (*much disturbed at this unexpected challenge*) said, You are a woman, and I give you quarter.

*Mrs. K.* I will not take quarter. There is no sex in souls; and in the present cause I fear not even Dr. Johnson himself.

(“ Bravo!” *was repeated by the company, and silence ensued.*)

Dr.

*Dr. J.* Well then, Madam, I persist in my charge, that you have seduced Miss H—— from the Christian Religion.

*Mrs. K.* If thou really knewest what were the principles of the Friends, thou would'st not say she had departed from Christianity. But, waving that discussion for the present, I will take the liberty to observe, that she had undoubted right to examine and to change her educational tenets whenever she supposed she had found them erroneous: as an accountable creature, it was her *duty* so to do.

*Dr. J.* Pshaw! pshaw!—an accountable creature!—girls accountable creatures!—It was her duty to remain with the Church wherein she was educated; she had no business to leave it.

*Mrs. K.* What! not for that which she apprehended to be better? According to this rule, Doctor, hadst thou been born in Turkey, it had been thy duty to have remained a Mahometan, notwithstanding Christian *evidence* might have wrought in thy mind the clearest conviction! and, if so, then let me ask, how would thy *conscience* have answered for such obstinacy at the great and last tribunal?

*Dr. J.* My conscience would not have been answerable.

*Mrs. K.* Whose then would?

*Dr. J.* Why the *State*, to be sure. In adhering to the Religion of the State as by law established, our implicit obedience therein becomes our *duty*.

*Mrs. K.* A Nation, or State, having a conscience, is a doctrine entirely new to me, and, indeed, a very curious piece of intelligence; for I have always understood that a Government, or State, is a creature of time only; beyond which it dissolves, and becomes a non-entity. Now, Gentlemen, *can* your imagination body forth this monstrous individual, or being, called a State, composed of millions of people? Can you behold it stalk-  
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ing forth into the next world, loaded with its mighty conscience, there to be rewarded, or punished, for the faith, opinions, and conduct, of its constituent *machines* called men? Surely the teeming brain of Poetry never held up to the fancy so wondrous a personage!

*(When the laugh occasioned by the personification was subsided, the Doctor very angrily replied,)*

I regard not what you say as to that matter. I hate the arrogance of the wench, in supposing herself a more competent judge of Religion than those who educated her. She imitated you, no doubt; but she ought not to have presumed to determine for herself in so important an affair.

Mrs. K. True, Doctor, I grant it, if, *as* thou seemest to imply, a wench of twenty years be not a moral agent.

Dr. J. I doubt it would be difficult to prove those deserve that character who turn Quakers.

Mrs. K. This severe retort, Doctor, induces me charitably to hope thou must be totally unacquainted with the principles of the people against whom thou art so exceedingly prejudiced, and that thou supposest us a set of Infidels or Deists.

Dr. J. Certainly, I do think you little better than Deists.

Mrs. K. This is indeed strange; 'tis passing strange, that a man of such universal reading and research has not thought it at least *expedient* to look into the cause of dissent of a society so long established, and so conspicuously singular!

Dr. J. Not I, indeed! I have not read your Barclay's Apology; and for this plain reason—I never thought it worth my while. You are upstart Sectaries, perhaps the best subdued by a silent contempt.

Mrs.



*Mrs. K.* This reminds me of the language of the Rabbies of old, when their Hierarchy was alarmed by the increasing influence, force, and simplicity, of dawning Truth, in their high day of worldly dominion. We meekly trust, our principles stand on the same solid foundation of simple truth; and we invite the acutest investigation. The reason thou givest for not having read Barclay's Apology is surely a very improper one for a man whom the world looks up to as a Moral Philosopher of the first rank; a Teacher, from whom they think they have a right to expect much information. To this expecting, enquiring world, how can Dr. Johnson acquit himself for remaining unacquainted with a book translated into five or six different languages, and which has been admitted into the libraries of almost every Court and University in Christendom!

*(Here the Doctor grew very angry, still more so at the space of time the Gentlemen allowed his antagonist wherein to make her defence, and his impatience excited Mr. BOSWELL himself, in a whisper, to say, "I never saw this mighty Lion so chafed before!")*

*The Doctor again repeated, that he did not think the Quakers deserved the name of Christians.*

*Mrs. K.* Give me leave then to endeavour to convince thee of thy error, which I will do by making before thee, and this respectable company, a confession of our faith. Creeds, or confessions of faith, are admitted by all to be the standard whereby we judge of every denomination of professors.

*(To this, every one present agreed; and even the Doctor grumbled out his assent.)*

*Mrs. K.* Well then, I take upon me to declare, that the people called Quakers do verily believe in the Holy Scriptures, and rejoice with the most full and reverential acceptance of the divine history of facts, as recorded in the New Testament. That we,  
consequently,

consequently, fully believe those historical articles summed up in what is called The Apostle's Creed, with these two exceptions only, to wit, our Saviour's descent into Hell, and the resurrection of the body. These mysteries we humbly leave just as they stand in the holy text, there being, from that ground, no authority for such assertion as is drawn up in the Creed. And now, Doctor, canst thou still deny to us the honourable title of Christians?

Dr. J. Well!—I must own I did not at all suppose you had so much to say for yourselves. However, I cannot forgive that little slut, for presuming to take upon herself as she has done.

Mrs. K. I hope, Doctor, thou wilt not remain unforgiving; and that you will renew your friendship, and joyfully meet at last in those bright regions where Pride and Prejudice can never enter!

Dr. J. Meet her! I never desire to meet fools any where.

*(This sarcastic turn of wit was so pleasantly received, that the Doctor joined in the laugh; his spleen was dissipated; he took his coffee, and became, for the remainder of the evening, very cheerful and entertaining.)*

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